PATTERNS OF POWER · CASE STUDY · IRAN

The Robe They Did Not Weave

Iran, 1501–2026 — How an Interpreter Class Holding a Credential No Shah Could Issue Overthrew a State, Built a Floor Because It Had None, and Was Captured by It; and Why the Men Who Command the Violence Keep a Ground They Cannot Forge

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

held as tested, not revealed

Preface: what this study is

A revision, a reframing, and the promise that it stands alone.

This study belongs to the Patterns of Power project and is a collaboration. The questions, the direction, the case selection and the final judgement are the author's; the historical synthesis, the drafting and the scholarly retrieval were done with Claude, Anthropic's model, with every load-bearing claim checked against a source before anything was built on it.

It is a rewrite of an earlier study in this series, and the rewrite was forced twice over.

The first correction is factual. The earlier version treated the succession to the Iranian leadership as a future event and made predictions about it. **The succession has already occurred.** Ali Khamenei was killed on 28 February 2026; an interim council held for a week; and on 8 March the Assembly of Experts named his son. A study that forecasts an event five months in the past is worse than useless, and the account of what actually happened is a far better test of the framework than the prediction was.

The second correction is analytical and is the reason for the rewrite rather than a patch. The earlier version framed the case as an interpreter class capturing a state. That is what happened in 1979 and it is not what the Islamic Republic now is. **The men who command the violence are the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps**, and the project's central question is therefore *their* question: how does a body that holds a country by force convert possession into ownership? Their answer is the one this project keeps finding. They draw their legality from an anchor **they did not create and could not have created** — a body of belief that accreted across a thousand years out of the sincere religious life of people who were not playing this game — and the contest inside their hierarchy is not over the anchor, which nobody can forge, but over **who controls the appointment to the office that speaks for it.**

Which is the same structure this project has documented among Turkish sultans and a powerless caliph, among slave soldiers who kept a caliph in Cairo for two and a half centuries, among shoguns who kept an emperor in Kyoto, and among a British High Commissioner who claimed his title from the men he had just destroyed. Same thing, different robe.

The study stands alone. No prior reading is assumed — not of this project, not of Iranian or Islamic history, not of any doctrine or scholar named. Shi'i institutions are built from the beginning in plain words.

One discipline governs throughout. The subject includes a monarchy maintained by secret police, a revolution followed by mass executions, a war that killed hundreds of thousands, a state that has shot its own citizens in the street, and a foreign campaign of decapitation strikes that has killed a head of state and dozens of officials within the last six months. To explain a mechanism is never to defend what it did or what was done to it. This project states that in the phrase *legibility is not pardon*, and discharges it in Part XIV.

A note on recency. The events of 2025–26 are ongoing as this is written in August 2026, and the material on them is drawn from press and analytical reporting rather than from settled scholarship. It is flagged as such wherever it appears and should be read as provisional.

The question

Two scenes, one anchor, opposite directions of authority.

December 1891. A jurist living in Samarra, in Ottoman Iraq — outside Iran, outside any Iranian institution's reach — rules that Iranians should stop smoking. He commands no soldiers, holds no office in the Iranian state, and can punish nobody in Iran for anything.

Within weeks the boycott is universal. Bazaars close nationwide. Non-Muslims observe it. It is reliably reported that the Shah's own wives and household servants refuse to smoke inside his palace. On 5 January 1892 Naser al-Din Shah revokes the tobacco concession he granted to a British company, at a cost in damages his treasury cannot bear. And when he announces it, the crowds do not resume — **they wait for word from Samarra**, which is the sharper fact, because it means they treated the jurist's permission and not the Shah's announcement as the thing that ended it.

March 2026. The Assembly of Experts, meeting mostly online in the week after a head of state was killed by a foreign airstrike, selects a successor under what reporting describes as heavy pressure from the Revolutionary Guard. The man chosen is a mid-ranking cleric of fifty-six who is the previous holder's son, who served in the Guard's ground forces as a teenager during the Iran–Iraq war, and who has for years exercised de facto authority over the Basij and the Guard's intelligence organisation. Generals who had backed him were, days earlier, openly angry at a transition council for announcing a de-escalation without them.

The same anchor stands behind both scenes and the authority runs in opposite directions. In 1891 a jurist outside the state's reach constrained the man with the army. In 2026 the men with the army determined who would hold the office that speaks for the same ground.

This study is about how the second scene came out of the first — in a hundred and thirty-five years, and mostly in the last forty-seven.

The framework, compressed

Possession, ownership, the anchor, the interpreter, the floor.

Everything below rests on a distinction ordinary speech collapses.

Possession is what force holds now. It is entirely present-tense and expires when the capacity sustaining it expires — at illness, at absence, and completely at death.

Ownership is a claim about the future and about other people: that this will be mine tomorrow while I sleep, and that when I die you will treat my son as its holder. Ownership is not a relation between a person and a thing. It is a structure of expectations about how other people will behave across time.

Force is sovereign over the first and impotent over the second. **The part of a holding that force cannot reach is exactly what makes it a holding, and it must therefore be manufactured out of something that is not force.** Read "a holding" broadly: an office, a rank, a command, a throne.

The coordination failure

Everyone in a world of armed men would prefer a settlement, and that explains nothing, because the question is why any settlement holds when breaking it would pay. The decisive calculation is not the aggressor's but the **bystanders'**. Each asks whether a seizure is his quarrel, and absent a common ground of title the answer is no: intervening buys casualties and an enemy, and intervening alone makes him the next target. So everyone waits, each knowing the others reason identically, and that shared expectation of inaction is what makes the seizure safe.

Warlordism is a coordination failure among the men who might have punished it, not a moral failure.

The anchor and its one condition

Suppose every holding draws its rightfulness from one source. The arithmetic inverts: letting a seizure stand establishes that holdings may be taken, which is a fact about *his* holding, and he can predict the others are computing the same thing. Call that source the **anchor**. It works on expectations rather than on wills: a man abstains not because he believes but because he can count.

From which the condition that organises this study: **a party competing for the spoils cannot be the author of who gets them**, because a title granted by a competitor is a forecast about that competitor's health. So the anchor must be **unforgeable by the current claimants**. And the danger is not principally that a strong man breaks the rule — breaking is legible and the coalition punishes it — but that he **changes** it, or controls who fills it, because neither of those triggers the coalition at all.

A working anchor must also be **determinate**, **common knowledge**, and **attached to an office rather than a man**.

Where anchors come from

The property an anchor needs — *no current claimant made this* — is a fact about history rather than a feature of a design, and facts about history cannot be added later. A ruler can build the temple, endow the priesthood and stage the ceremony; what he cannot do is make it true that he did not.

So the material must come from before the players existed and must have been made for some other purpose. Biology calls this **exaptation**, after features that arise under one pressure and are later co-opted for a use they did not evolve to serve — feathers long predate flight and appear to have served insulation and display; flight did not cause feathers, flight *found* them. Cosmologies existed, doing other things — explaining the world, fixing the calendar, ordering marriage, burying the dead — and the coordination problem found them.

Which yields the finding this study is built on: **sincerity is the manufacturing process, and cynicism is parasitic on it.** A body of belief becomes authorless by accreting over generations out of genuine attempts to understand the world, revised by nobody in particular. That process cannot be run on purpose, because running it on purpose is what disqualifies the output. An instrumental elite can capture such a stock, staff it, fund it and live off it for centuries. **It cannot make one.**

The interpreter, and his two jobs

An anchor does not read itself. Somebody says what it requires, and that class exists structurally: specialisation divides knowing as well as labour, so each person must delegate most of what he holds to sources he cannot check, and a position appears between the many and what they cannot reach.

That class does **two separable jobs**. The **vertical** job is telling the apex no, which requires that the apex cannot revoke the interpreter's standing. The **horizontal** job is making every powerful man's title checkable against one source, which requires only

that the interpreter be **singular** — not brave, not independent. **Capture destroys the first almost immediately and leaves the second intact**, which is why bought clergies are compatible with centuries of stability.

And the measurable variable is **where the credential is issued**: *fused*, where the claimant is his own interpreter; *domestic*, where the ruler appoints, examines, licenses or funds; *foreign*, where it comes from outside every domestic claimant's reach — the only position from which a refusal can be survived.

The floor

The **floor** is the coercive capacity that makes verdicts land, and it is not bedrock. An army is a set of armed men each of whom could refuse, so it has the same coordination problem one scale down, with its own anchor: the oath, the standard, the chain of command, the paymaster. **The floor is a second settlement nested inside the first**, and it can evaporate without a battle when the forecast changes.

What matters about a floor is **what its obedience is addressed to** — a man, an office, or a ground. And the theorem: a ruler who builds a force recruited from people the existing order does not command gets one no priest can turn against him, and thereby creates the one armed body outside the coalition that punishes seizures. **A guard that the anchor cannot turn against you is a guard the anchor cannot turn back.**

Part I — The stock: what accreted, and who made it

A millennium of material, none of it made for this.

The men who now command Iran draw their legality from a body of belief assembled across a thousand years by people who had no idea it would ever be used this way. Setting out what accreted, and when, is not background. **It is the audit of the stock being drawn down.**

An imposed conversion that took

Iran before 1501 was religiously mixed and predominantly Sunni. In that year Ismail I, at the head of Turkmen tribal cavalry, took Tabriz and declared **Twelver Shi'ism** the religion of his new state — a conversion carried out across the following century by importing scholars, endowing seminaries, patronage, pressure and force.

That is this project's recursion finding in its cleanest form: **the anchor the Guard now stands on was imposed by a warlord**, four hundred and seventy-eight years before the revolution, and had become the shape of the world for everyone inside it long before anybody in 1979 was born. Nobody in twentieth-century Iran experienced Shi'ism as an arrangement, which is exactly what a build that has taken looks like from inside.

An absent ruler

Twelver Shi'ism holds that authority passed from the Prophet through a line of twelve divinely-appointed Imams, and that the twelfth did not die but entered **occultation** — concealment — in the ninth century, remaining alive and hidden, to return at the end of time.

Score that as an anchor and the configuration matches nothing else in this project's archive. **Unforgeable: absolutely.** No man can be the Hidden Imam; no conquest confers it; no state can appoint one; there is nothing to capture, buy or kill. **Common knowledge: total. Attached to a person** — but one who cannot die, which converts the usual fatal weakness into a strength.

And **radically indeterminate about who acts for him in his absence.** That is the crack through which everything in this study travels, and it is a thousand years old.

A class made by its followers

Across the eighteenth century Shi'i scholarship settled an internal dispute in favour of the school holding that qualified jurists may exercise independent reasoning on questions the texts do not settle, and that ordinary believers must therefore follow a living qualified jurist in practice. From that emerged, across the nineteenth century, the **marja' al-taqlid** — "source of emulation," the senior rank of Shi'i authority.

Nobody appoints him. There is no election, no investiture, no chair conferred by a state or a synod. A jurist becomes one through reputation among his peers, the students he trains, and — decisively — **the number of ordinary believers who choose to follow him.** The credential is issued from below and sideways, over decades.

Funded by nobody's treasury

Shi'i religious dues, *khums*, include a portion — the *sahm-e Imam*, the Imam's share — understood to belong to the Hidden Imam and therefore paid, in his absence, to the jurist the believer follows, who spends it on seminaries, students and charity.

Structurally that is **a voluntary tax system running directly from millions of laymen to a scholarly class with no state in the circuit at any point.** The seminaries at Qom, Najaf and Karbala ran on it. No government could interrupt it, because it passed through nothing a government held.

A calendar that schedules its own next occasion

One further item, and it will matter in Part V. Shi'i practice marks the fortieth day after a death with a public mourning ceremony, and the tradition's central narrative is the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson at Karbala — a story about rightful authority destroyed by a usurping state, rehearsed publicly every year for thirteen centuries.

None of this was made by anyone playing for power in the twentieth century. The occultation is ninth-century. The emulation system is eighteenth- and nineteenth-. The mourning calendar is older than both. It accreted out of the sincere religious life of people who could not have imagined its uses — which is precisely the framework's account of where a usable ground comes from, and precisely why it cannot be made to order.

Part II — The credential no state could issue

What a live vertical function looks like.

Put the three properties of Part I together and the pre-revolutionary Iranian clergy score at the far end of the credential variable in every respect at once. **Geographically foreign** — the senior seats were Najaf and Karbala, in Ottoman and then Iraqi territory. **Financially independent** — funded by dues paid directly by believers. **Credentialled by following** — made by peers and laymen, not by any office.

The framework's prediction for a foreign credential is that the vertical function is live, because a refusal can be survived. The Tobacco Protest is what that looked like.

The concession was granted in March 1890: a fifty-year British monopoly over the production, sale and export of Iranian tobacco. Protests spread through 1891; a cleric was exiled from Shiraz for preaching against it; Tabriz was disorderly enough that the Shah suspended the concession there. Then in December 1891 a ruling attributed to **Mirza Hasan Shirazi** — the pre-eminent jurist of the age, resident in Samarra — declared tobacco use tantamount to **war against the Hidden Imam**.

Read the formula. It does not invoke the jurist's own authority. **It invokes the anchor directly and places the smoker on the wrong side of it** — which is the horizontal mechanism operating on a whole population at once. The question is no longer whether you object to a concession but whether you will be seen standing against the ground everyone else stands on.

Run the diagnostic and every lever is missing. *Could the Shah punish him?* No — Ottoman territory, funded by Iranian believers directly, holding no office the Shah had given. *Appoint a rival?* No — there is no post to fill, and a state-appointed *marja'* would have no emulators, because emulation is chosen by the emulator. *Outbid him?* No, and this is the deepest point: what the jurist held was not a resource but **a position in other people's expectations**, and an offer cannot transfer a following.

Note what the episode was not. Shirazi did not claim the right to rule and did not attempt it. He exercised a veto and stopped. The traditional Shi'i position, held by most jurists for most of the period, was **quietist**: in the Imam's absence no government is fully legitimate, and the jurist's authority is religious and juridical rather than

political. Veto without rule. That distinction is the thing the twentieth century abolished.

Part III — The capture campaign that selected for it

A ruler who breaks every institution he can reach concentrates the opposition into the one he cannot.

The Pahlavi shahs understood the problem and worked on it for fifty years, and what they achieved and failed to achieve is the framework's clearest demonstration of why credential distance matters.

What Reza Shah reached. After a coup in 1921 and a coronation in 1925 he built a centralising secular-nationalist state. Judicial functions passed to state courts; education to a state system; religious endowments under state supervision; clerical dress regulated; the veil banned outright in 1936 and enforced by police. That is exactly what a ruler does to an interpretive class — converting a foreign credential to a domestic one by taking the functions that give it purchase.

What he could not reach. The credential itself. A *marja'* was made by a following and a guild, funded by voluntary dues, and often resident abroad. There was no appointment to withhold, no salary to stop, no examination to set, no chair to abolish. So the institution went quiet and did not go away, and the seminary at Qom, reorganised in 1922, went on training the men who would matter, on money the state did not control.

And here is the finding that governs 1979. Across the middle of the century Mohammad Reza Shah — restored to full power by the Anglo-American coup of 1953 and increasingly reliant on the SAVAK security service — dismantled or neutralised every organised alternative to himself. Parties banned or manufactured, and from 1975 replaced by a single mandatory one. Nationalist and left oppositions broken, imprisoned or driven underground. Press controlled.

Every one of those institutions held a credential the Shah could reach.

> ***A capture campaign selects for institutions with foreign credentials.*** *A ruler who dismantles every rival that holds standing from him discovers, at the end, that the only surviving organised opposition is the one that never did — and he will have concentrated the entire opposition into it.*

The break came in 1963 over the White Revolution, whose land redistribution struck at religious endowments. A then-junior figure in Qom, **Ruhollah Khomeini**, attacked the programme and the Shah in unprecedented terms, was arrested in June, and was released after protests that were suppressed with heavy loss of life. In 1964 he attacked a bill granting American military personnel legal immunity, and was exiled.

One detail from that year compresses the whole of Part II into a sentence. Khomeini's life was in danger, and senior clerics — including **Shariatmadari**, then the leading figure at Qom — moved to have him publicly recognised as a **Grand Ayatollah**, on the understanding that a *marja'* could not lawfully be executed. He was exiled instead: to Turkey, then to **Najaf**, where he remained until 1978.

The credential the state could not issue was what prevented the state from killing him — and the state's answer was to expel him into the seat of that credential, where he taught for thirteen years.

Part IV — The manufacture

What was built in Najaf, out of what, and who called it new.

In 1970, in Najaf, Khomeini delivered lectures published as *Islamic Government* and known by the name of their doctrine: **velayat-e faqih**, the guardianship of the jurist.

The claim. The Hidden Imam is absent, but the community's need for government does not go into occultation with him. The Imam's functions — governing, judging, collecting and disbursing, commanding — must be exercised by somebody; Islamic law is a complete legal system requiring an executive; therefore in the Imam's absence those functions devolve on the qualified jurist, who holds the Imam's authority in trust. Clerical rule is not a departure from Shi'ism but its requirement, and monarchy is a usurpation.

What it was built out of. The framework says an anchor's raw material cannot be manufactured but its **assembly** can be, provided the assembly is presented as recovery. Both halves are visible. The material was genuinely pre-existing: the Hidden Imam's authority is not Khomeini's invention, and the technical basis of the extension is an established doctrine — the jurist's *guardianship* over those unable to manage their own affairs, orphans, the insane, the property of absent persons. That guardianship was uncontroversial and centuries old. What Khomeini did was **extend it by analogy from persons who cannot act for themselves to the community as a whole.** And it was presented as restoration of what Shi'ism had always required and been prevented from exercising by tyranny.

And the hostile witnesses said it was new. The framework's test for distinguishing a found ground from a made one is whether the order's enemies, at the time, attacked the source as an *innovation* — enemies having every incentive to say so if it was true and to attack on some other ground if it was not.

Iran returns the most decisive result the test has produced anywhere, and it goes against the doctrine. Velayat-e faqih was rejected by nearly all of Khomeini's fellow scholars. Before the revolution essentially the only senior jurist to endorse it was **Montazeri**, Khomeini's own student. The senior figure at Najaf, **Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei** — the pre-eminent Shi'i jurist of the age — rejected it outright. **Shariatmadari** rejected it, on the ground that clerical rule is not required by Islam and that vesting sovereignty in a jurist by divine right nullifies popular sovereignty. Sustained criticism

came from the clergy of Mashhad for years after 1979, and the senior jurists at Najaf have remained opposed ever since.

The substantive objection names the analogy and refuses it: extending guardianship from orphans and the insane to the general public **puts sane adults in the category of those who cannot act for themselves.**

And the assembler was the beneficiary. The framework's weakened thesis permits deliberate assembly provided the assembler is *not* the beneficiary of what the anchor authorises — the philologists who assembled national traditions were not the men who would rule the resulting states, and that separation is what carried nationalism.

Khomeini authored the doctrine and became the Guardian.

That proviso is violated as plainly as the record permits, and the framework's expectation is fragility **at the first transfer**, when the doctrine must qualify somebody who did not write it. Parts VIII and IX are the two transfers.

Part V — 1978: the clock, and the floor that evaporated

A coordination machine built out of a mourning calendar.

On 7 January 1978 a state-controlled newspaper attacked Khomeini. The next day seminary students protested in **Qom** and security forces opened fire.

What followed is the purest coordination technology in this project's archive, and nobody designed it. The deaths at Qom produced, forty days later on **18 February**, commemorations across the country — the largest at Tabriz, where a mosque closure produced a clash, a death and a riot that burned the ruling party's headquarters and left more dead. Those produced, forty days on, commemorations in dozens of cities and further deaths at Yazd. Those produced another round in May. Participants called it *doing the forty-forty*.

Read it through the framework and it is a **self-clocking common-knowledge machine.** Ritual works by letting each person see everyone else receiving it — and this does something no ordinary ceremony does. It **schedules the next occasion automatically**, in advance, on a date every participant can calculate, in a form the state could not ban without banning mourning. Each round's casualties set the next date. Every Iranian knew when the next one was and knew that every other Iranian knew.

And it ran on the one organisational network the Shah had been unable to dismantle, for the reason in Part III. The mosques were not merely a place to gather. They were **the only surviving institution with a credential the state did not issue**, which is why they were still standing when everything else had been broken, and why the revolution took a religious rather than a nationalist or leftist shape.

The floor. By late 1978 the Shah had an army of some four hundred thousand men, the most sophisticated arsenal in the region, and a feared security service. On **11 February 1979** the Imperial Iranian Army declared itself **neutral**, and the monarchy ended. There was no defeat and no decisive battle. Units did not lose; they stopped.

The framework covers this exactly. Obedience is a forecast each soldier makes about the others, and a force collapses when that forecast changes — overnight, without casualties, in men who are neither cowards nor traitors. The diagnostic question is what the obedience was addressed to, and the Imperial Army's was addressed to the monarchy and substantially to the Shah's person: he had built it, promoted through it

and appointed its senior officers. Which made it maximally reliable while the monarchy was the focal point and gave it nothing to fall back on when the monarchy ceased to be.

The Shah's floor did not lose a war. It lost a forecast.

Part VI — The winners had no floor

An interpreter who becomes a claimant, and the price paid within three years.

Khomeini returned on 1 February 1979. A March referendum approved an Islamic Republic; a constitution was drafted through the year and ratified in December.

It installed velayat-e faqih as the state's organising principle: a **Leader** holding ultimate authority above the elected president and parliament, commanding the armed forces, appointing the head of the judiciary, and appointing half the **Guardian Council**, which could strike down legislation and — decisively — vet candidates for elected office.

The crucial fact is not that it was theocratic. It is that the office made the interpreter into a claimant.

For four centuries the Shi'i jurist's authority had been unforgeable by any Iranian ruler precisely because the jurist was *not* a ruler: no office the state conferred, no salary it paid, frequently outside the country. The 1979 constitution took the most senior interpreter in the country and made him the apex of the state.

The framework's prediction is immediate. **A source of title that acquires a floor becomes a competitor, and a competitor's word is worth his army.** The project has one prior instance in exactly this shape — the Abbasid caliphate, militarily powerless for centuries and destroyed within seventeen years of the single occasion on which it raised an army of its own.

The vertical function ended within three years, and in the form the framework specifies. **Shariatmadari** was the most senior *marja'* in Iran, with a large following, who had opposed velayat-e faqih publicly and boycotted the constitutional referendum. His associated party was crushed after a rising in Tabriz and dissolved. In 1982 he was implicated in an alleged plot, **stripped of his clerical rank** — an act without precedent, since the rank had never been in any state's gift — and held under house arrest until his death in 1986.

The state defrocked a source of emulation. Four hundred years of a credential no ruler could touch, ended by an administrative act. And it was systematised: a Special Court for the Clergy under the Leader's authority; Friday prayer leaders across the country appointed from his office; seminary funding drawn progressively into state channels; vast endowed foundations under his control.

> ***The revolution converted the Shi'i clerical credential from foreign to domestic**, and destroyed the vertical function that had made the clergy the only institution in Iran capable of resisting a shah.*

What followed is the domestic signature exactly: **heroic individual refusals and no institutional capacity to compel.** Montazeri — designated successor, and after 1989 among the most senior jurists alive — objected to the mass executions of 1988, was dismissed, spent years under house arrest, and changed nothing. There has been no successful clerical veto of a Leader in forty-seven years, in the one country whose clergy had a documented history of vetoing its ruler.

And the winners had no floor. The clergy had taken the state by mobilisation, not by arms. The Imperial Army had declined to save the monarchy, which is not the same as being reliable to the men who won; it was purged heavily and never trusted, because its address had been the monarchy and nobody could be certain the address had genuinely changed rather than gone quiet.

An interpreter class that has become the apex and has no army is in the most exposed position the framework describes. So they built one.

Part VII — So they built a floor, and it grew

The guard theorem, running in real time for forty-seven years.

In the spring of 1979 the revolutionary militias that had appeared during the collapse were unified by decree into the **Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami** — the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, formally established in May 1979. A mass volunteer force, the **Basij**, followed in November.

Every feature matches the guard theorem's recruitment criterion.

Recruited from people the old order did not command — not from the officer corps, the academies or the conscript pool, but from the neighbourhood committees, the mosque networks and the young men of the revolution: exactly the population with no standing in the institution being replaced.

Screened for ideology rather than professional qualification, which is the same criterion stated positively. What was purchased was not competence but **the absence of an alternative address**.

And addressed constitutionally to the revolution rather than to the state. Article 143 assigns the regular army the country's independence and territorial integrity; **Article 150 assigns the Guard the duty of guarding the Revolution and its achievements.** Two forces, two objects of obedience, in one document.

The drift

The framework says the two-floor architecture is not an equilibrium but **a slope with a ratchet**: in a crisis the apex uses the force he trusts, so it grows, and every increment reduces his need for the other, which he then has less reason to fund; and no apex has a motive to strengthen the force that could be turned against him at the expense of the force that cannot.

The Iranian record fits closely. The Iran–Iraq war of 1980–88 expanded the Guard enormously in size, structure and prestige. Post-war reconstruction gave it an economic base through its engineering arm, and from there into construction, energy, telecommunications and import channels. It acquired its own ground, naval and aerospace branches, the missile programme and a foreign-operations arm. It has supplied presidents, ministers, governors and parliamentarians. When the question of

merging the two forces was raised in the Iranian press in 2026 — after decades in which it was not discussable — the obstacle identified was **constitutional rather than administrative**, because the Guard's mandate and its binding to the Leader are written into the document.

The clock

The framework's guard theorem carries a generational clock with a precise mechanism: **the moment a guard acquires a base, it stops being a body with nowhere else to stand and becomes a lineage — and a lineage is a claimant.** The Janissaries are the dated instance: forbidden marriage, property and trade expressly so they should leave no descendants; permitted to marry in 1566; hereditary within two generations; deposing and killing a sultan in 1622 for proposing to restore the original prohibitions.

The Iranian Guard was granted its base deliberately, as post-war reconstruction policy and as reward. Forty-seven years on it has property, industry, families and a second generation.

What the framework predicts is not a coup. It is that an armed body with an independent economic base ceases to be a pure instrument and becomes a party whose consent is required — so that the relationship to the apex inverts gradually from service to negotiation. Part IX is that inversion becoming visible.

Part VIII — 1989: the qualification lowered to fit the man

The first transfer, and a rule changed rather than broken.

The 1979 constitution required the Leader to be a **marja'-e taqlid**.

That requirement was not decoration. It was **the one clause keeping the anchor foreign to the state**, because a *marja'* is made by the scholarly guild and a lay following and cannot be appointed by anybody. Under the original article, the man at the apex of the Iranian state had to hold a qualification the Iranian state could not issue. It was, by some distance, the most important sentence in the document.

Montazeri, the designated successor and the only senior jurist who had endorsed velayat-e faqih before the revolution, fell out with Khomeini over the direction of the state and over the 1988 executions, and was removed in the spring of 1989. That left a problem with no solution inside the rules: the senior *marja'* of the day had given at best lukewarm support to velayat-e faqih itself, and a genuinely qualified source of emulation who believed the doctrine and could hold the state together did not exist.

On 24 April 1989, from his deathbed, Khomeini appointed a council to revise the constitution. He died on 3 June. On **4 June** the Assembly of Experts selected **Ali Khamenei** — then president, a middle-ranking cleric who was **not a marja'**. A senior *marja'* was proposed first, received few votes, and was passed over. On **28 July 1989**, by referendum, Article 109 was rewritten: the requirement of emulation-source status removed, replaced by a lower standard of juristic scholarship together with political and administrative perspicacity.

They chose the man on 4 June and amended the qualification on 28 July. It remains the only amendment to the constitution.

Three things follow and they compound.

It was rule-change, not rule-breaking, and it drew no coalition. Nobody was deposed, no law violated, the procedure impeccable — a council appointed by the founder, a vote in the Assembly, a referendum with an overwhelming majority. Which is exactly why nothing formed against it: **the bystander mechanism is keyed to violations of the ground and has nothing to say about a lawful alteration of it.**

It is a catchment edit, and the framework has seen the move before. In 1758 the Qianlong emperor, facing a Mongol religious office whose holder could also be a

Chinggisid dynast, decreed that all future incarnations must be found in Tibet — leaving doctrine, monasteries and authority untouched and changing only the rule about where the next holder may come from. The finding it produced applies here: **a credential filled by procedure is unforgeable at the level of the individual and capturable at the level of the rule.** Nobody can arrange to be a *marja'*; but the *requirement* was written in a constitution, and a constitution has an amendment procedure.

And it is the moment the credential finished becoming domestic. Before 28 July 1989 the qualification for the apex was conferred by the seminary and the emulators. After it, the qualification was whatever the constitution said, and the constitution was in the hands of the order it governed.

One further detail completes the picture, and it is the expenditure tell running in reverse. Considerable effort went into promoting the new Leader's standing as a religious authority in the years that followed, and it was conspicuously more successful outside Iran than within Qom. **An order that must campaign for its apex's credential has conceded that the credential was not conferred by the body that confers it.**

Part IX — 2026: the inversion completed

The second transfer, and the eight days in which the floor authored itself.

On **28 February 2026** Ali Khamenei was killed in a joint US–Israeli strike on his compound in Tehran, one of a campaign of decapitation strikes that had begun in June 2025 and had already killed the IRGC commander-in-chief, the aerospace commander and the chief of the general staff on a single morning, and that would kill dozens of senior figures over the following months.

What happened in the eight days that followed is the sharpest sequence this project has recorded anywhere.

The order of events

28 February. The Leader is killed. His IRGC commander, Mohammad Pakpour — himself appointed only eight months earlier, after his predecessor was killed — is killed the same day.

1 March. Ahmad Vahidi becomes commander-in-chief of the Revolutionary Guard. An Interim Leadership Council is constituted, of the president, the head of the judiciary and a senior cleric.

Stop on that date. Under the constitution, the commander of the Guard is appointed by the Leader — by a signed decree issued in his own name, as the published decrees of June 2025 show. On 1 March 2026 **there was no Leader.** The Guard acquired a new commander-in-chief during an interregnum, before any authority existed that could confer the appointment.

3 March. In an initial round of voting the Assembly of Experts gives Mojtaba Khamenei the necessary two-thirds majority — reported as the moment the Guard's generals had gained the upper hand.

6 March. Israeli bunker-busting bombs destroy the Leader's compound in central Tehran.

7 March. The president, speaking for the three-person transition council, announces that Iran will cease attacking Arab states in the Gulf and apologises. The Guard generals running the war, and backing Mojtaba, are reported as **outraged** — the council had made a decision of state without them.

8 March. The Assembly announces the selection. The Guard and the armed forces pledge their backing immediately. The foreign minister had been publicly denying the choice while it was being arranged; reporting describes the Assembly as having met largely online under **heavy pressure from the Guard**.

What was chosen, and why

Mojtaba Khamenei, fifty-six, is a mid-ranking cleric — as his father had been in 1989 — with no standing as a source of emulation. He served in the Guard's ground forces as a teenager during the Iran–Iraq war, and for years exercised de facto authority over the Basij and the Guard's intelligence organisations. He is closely tied to the current IRGC commander and to the Guard's former intelligence chief.

He is also, and this is the point, **the previous Leader's son** — in a republic founded by overthrowing a monarchy, whose ruling ideology explicitly disfavours hereditary succession.

The framework says exactly why the generals wanted him, and it is not sentiment or loyalty.

Ask what a general's rank is worth. It is conferred by a decree signed by the Leader — which places the Guard, with respect to its own leadership, in the **domestic** credential position: the qualification is issued by the apex it serves. Now ask what happens when the apex dies. Every commander's warrant has no issuer.

And ask what the alternatives were. A general could have taken the office. But **a general who takes the throne is a competitor authoring his own title**, and every other general knows it, and a title from a competitor is not a title but a forecast about that competitor's health. Whoever took it would have to be obeyed by men who had watched him take it, each of whom would be computing whether he could do the same. That is the framework's warlordism, with an air force.

A senior and genuinely qualified outside cleric was available — a well-credentialled ayatollah with a substantial scholarly record who had held the Guardian Council, the Friday prayer leadership of Qom and the headship of the seminaries. But any faction could have contested him, and any faction that installed him would have been visibly his author.

What the generals needed was a source of title that none of them could have become. And descent is the one thing that cannot be conferred by conquest, purchase or decree. No IRGC commander can become Ali Khamenei's son.

> ***The Guard needs a Leader for the same reason barons need a king: not to be governed, but so that none of them can be authored by another.***

That is the bystander mechanism running *inside the floor*, and it explains a behaviour that otherwise looks like restraint. The Guard did not take the state in March 2026 because taking it would have destroyed the thing it needed. It reached instead for a claim it could not forge — which is precisely what this project's framework says armed men do when they want a settlement rather than a war.

What it bought, and what it cost

Unforgeable: completely. Nobody can enter a bloodline.

Determinate: for one generation, and no further, because there is no rule of succession attached to it and asserting one would be an open admission of what has been built.

Attached to a man rather than an office, which the framework lists as a defect and which is now doing the load-bearing work.

And with no time behind it. The claim is five months old. The men who must be coordinated by it are the men who watched it being made, in a week, under bombing, while denying it publicly. That is the Türk problem in its exact form: *an anchor asserted by the founder's own generation cannot coordinate the people who watched the assertion.* The First Türk Khaganate ran twenty-nine years on a claim of that kind and split at its first contested succession.

And it contradicts the founding doctrine openly, which the doctrine's own senior critics — still sitting in Najaf, still outside anybody's reach — will not fail to notice.

The state as of this writing

Five months on, the arrangement is visibly not settled. The current IRGC commander is described in analytical reporting as leading the faction dominating regime decision-making, and as possibly more consequential than the president or the Leader. The president is reported as having had to *persuade* the Leader to accept an agreement in June. In early August, reporting on a further agreement had the leadership approving it and the Leader not having approved it.

The framework does not need that reporting to be exactly right in its particulars. What it identifies is a **shape**: an apex whose consent is negotiated rather than assumed, alongside a commander whose appointment preceded the apex's existence. On the framework's reading that is the domestic-credential position with the loop closed — the Guard authors the Leader who authors the Guard — which is the **fused** position,

and the fused position's failure mode is that it looks strong until the first genuinely contested succession *inside the armed body itself*.

Part X — Why the men with the guns keep a robe they did not weave

The analytical core, and the answer to the case's real question.

Set aside the theology and ask the question this project asks of everybody.

The Revolutionary Guard commands the violence, controls the missile force, holds the intelligence organisations, runs a substantial share of the economy, and in March 2026 determined who would hold the highest office in the state. **They are the armed men.** And their problem is the project's problem: how does a body that holds a country by force convert possession into ownership?

They could not solve it by themselves, and the framework says why in one line. **Whatever a general mints is worth a general's current strength**, because he is a party to the contest and every other general knows it. A commander who declared himself the source of Iranian legitimacy would have produced, in the same act, the reason for the next commander to try.

So the warrant has to come from somewhere none of them could have made it — and the striking fact about their situation is that such a thing was **already lying there**, and had been for a thousand years, made by people who were not playing.

The occultation of the twelfth Imam is ninth-century, and no general can be him or appoint him. The emulation system is eighteenth- and nineteenth-century, and was built by scholars and their followers, not by any state. The mourning calendar that timed the revolution is older than both. The Karbala narrative that forms the Guard's own men is thirteen centuries old and is a story *about a rightful authority destroyed by a usurping state* — which is not a convenient thing to have manufactured, and nobody did manufacture it.

Every load-bearing piece of the Islamic Republic's legality was made by people who could not have imagined its use and who were not competing for anything it distributes. That is exactly the property the framework says a source of title must have and exactly the property no ruler can confer on himself. The Guard did not build it. The Guard captured it — which is what the framework says instrumental elites do, because capture is the only available relationship to a thing of that kind.

And the corollary, which is the sentence this whole study is for:

Cynicism is parasitic on prior sincerity. *An armed class can capture an anchor, staff it, fund it, defend it and live off it for centuries. It cannot make one, because making one requires not being about power. Every order of this shape is drawing down a stock produced generations earlier by people who meant it.*

And so the contest relocates

If the anchor cannot be forged, and cannot be discarded without destroying the thing that makes anyone's rank worth holding, then there is only one prize left. **The contest moves to control of the appointment.**

Nobody in Iran is going to contest Twelver Shi'ism, the occultation, or the authority of the Imam. Those are not available to be contested and no faction gains by trying. What is available is **who gets to determine the occupant of the office that speaks for them** — and that is precisely what has been fought over, three times, by three different methods, in forty-seven years:

1979 — the office is created, and the doctrine that fills it is written by the man who will fill it.

1989 — the qualification is lowered so that the available man can hold it. The rule is edited rather than broken.

2026 — the Assembly that fills the office is pressured by the armed force whose commanders the office appoints, and installs a man whose claim rests on descent.

Three moves, and none of them touched the anchor. All three touched the **route to the chair**. Which is the framework's §1.6 danger — that the fatal move is not breaking the rule but changing it or controlling who fills it — demonstrated three times in one order within one lifetime.

Part XI — Same thing, different robe

Four other orders in which armed men kept a ground they could not forge.

The Iranian arrangement looks unique because its robe is unusual. Structurally it is one of the commonest configurations in this project's archive.

The Seljuks and the Abbasid caliph. By the mid-eleventh century the caliph in Baghdad had no army, no treasury worth the name, and no capacity to compel anyone. Turkish sultans who had taken Persia and Iraq by force nonetheless sought investiture from him and kept the office alive for centuries — because the investiture is what made a Turkish chieftain's distribution of land among his emirs something other than one warlord's personal favour to another. Vertical function: zero. Horizontal function: full. **And the caliphate was destroyed within seventeen years of the single occasion on which it raised an army of its own** — powerlessness was not the puzzle but the qualification.

The Mamluks and the Cairo caliph. Slave soldiers who seized Egypt in 1250 sent men into the desert to find a survivor of the massacre of the Baghdad caliphs hiding among Bedouin, installed him in Cairo, and maintained that office for two hundred and fifty-six years. A military caste with no dynastic claim of its own, keeping a ceremonial source of title it had physically collected and could not have created.

The shogun and the emperor. A military government ruling Japan for two and a half centuries in the name of an emperor with no armies, whose line's antiquity was precisely what made it unforgeable — and who, when the arrangement failed, was the instrument through which it was ended.

Lugard and the emirs. A British High Commissioner who destroyed the Sokoto Caliphate in 1903 and then claimed his title *from the men he had defeated* — arguing that their conquest had been legitimate enough to create a transferable right — while announcing in the same speech that he would not interfere with the Muslim religion, because he could not become caliph, could not acquire Islamic learning, and could not confer the standing of a scholar. He took the appointment and left the god.

What Iran adds to the set is the full cycle in one order, compressed into forty-seven years, with the paperwork.

Everywhere else the armed men arrive from outside the interpretive institution and take up a relation to it. In Iran the interpretive institution **took the state itself**, discovered it had no floor, built one, and was captured by what it had built. The

Abbasid arc — an authority that acquires an army and is consumed by it — ran over three centuries in Iraq. In Iran it has run in two generations, and the same men are alive at both ends of it.

Part XII — What the framework now predicts

Stated so that they can fail.

P1 — The contest stays on the appointment, not the doctrine. Future factional conflict inside the Iranian elite should concern control of the Assembly of Experts, the Guardian Council's vetting, and the mechanics of leadership selection, and should not involve any serious challenge to Twelver Shi'i doctrine itself. *Falsified if* a significant faction attacks the anchor rather than the route to it.

P2 — The Leader's authority is bounded by the Guard's consent, and the boundary is visible in decisions rather than in statements. One should observe decisions of state taken without the Leader's prior agreement, or agreements the Leader is reported as declining to endorse, alongside undiminished formal deference. *Falsified if* the Leader is observed overruling the Guard's senior command on a matter the command has publicly committed to.

P3 — The fused loop fails at the first contested succession inside the Guard. The order should hold while the Guard's command is uncontested and should be at maximum risk not at the Leader's death but at a disputed commander's appointment, because there will be no authority outside the Guard whose word settles it. *Falsified if* a disputed IRGC command succession is resolved by an external authority whose ruling is accepted.

P4 — Descent will be defended without being stated as a rule. The bloodline claim should be used to legitimate the current occupant and should never be codified as a succession principle, because codifying it would concede what has been built. *Falsified if* hereditary succession is formalised, or if it is publicly repudiated by the men who benefit from it.

P5 — The seminary opposition remains unrepaired and available. The senior jurists of Najaf, whose credential is still outside Iranian reach, should continue to withhold endorsement, and their opposition should become a resource for any future claimant who needs one. *Falsified if* the Najaf establishment endorses the Iranian doctrine, or if it is successfully brought within Iranian control.

P6 — Guard succession will be by co-option from within. New commanders should come from the existing senior command, appointed formally by the Leader and

substantively by the command itself, with the decree following rather than causing the selection.

And the reading fails as a whole if this is found: a Leader who removes a serving IRGC commander-in-chief against the wishes of the Guard's senior command and makes it stick, on a matter of consequence. That would show the appointment power still runs the direction the constitution says it does.

Part XIII — What it shows, and where it strains

What the case gives the framework

A control case stronger than Canossa. The Tobacco Protest is the vertical function demonstrated with a credential foreign on three axes at once — geographic, financial and conferential — and the result was more complete than any European instance: not a humiliated emperor but a reversed policy, at ruinous cost, with compliance inside the ruler's own household, and crowds waiting on the jurist's permission rather than the ruler's.

A general finding about capture campaigns. A ruler who dismantles every rival institution concentrates the entire opposition into whichever one holds a credential he cannot reach.

A coordination technology the corpus did not have. The forty-day cycle is a common-knowledge machine that schedules its own next occurrence, calculably, in a form the state could not prohibit.

Two instances of the catchment edit in one order, in 1989 and 2026, joining Qianlong's decree of 1758 as the third case of the same move.

And the full cycle in one lifetime: interpreter class captures state → discovers it has no floor → builds one → is captured by it → and the office it created becomes a thing the armed men appoint.

Where it strains, and the prediction that has not landed

The manufacture prediction has still not come true. The framework holds that visibly manufactured grounds fail — Diocletian's sacralisation, Henry's Supreme Headship demoted by his own daughter, Akbar's attestation dying with him. Velayat-e faqih was manufactured by a named man in the 1970s, attacked at the time as innovation by the pre-eminent jurists of the tradition, and has organised a state for forty-seven years through a war, two leadership deaths, sanctions, repeated mass protest, and now a foreign decapitation campaign.

Four readings and I do not know which is right. *It is not yet a test* — two transfers, both managed under emergency conditions by the incumbent's own machinery. *The floor is doing the work* — an order that must shoot its own citizens is not demonstrating

that its ground has taken, and the framework's own measure of a settlement is cheapness. *The weakened thesis is satisfied* — the material was old and the doctrine was presented as recovery, so only the strong claim fails. Or *the framework is wrong about visible manufacture*, and a ground can be built inside living memory over the objection of a tradition's own authorities, provided the builder holds the state long enough for a generation to grow up inside it.

I lean toward the second and third combined. And I record that the framework's best-supported prediction here — **assembler as beneficiary produces fragility at transfer** — has now landed twice: the doctrine could not qualify its own second holder without an amendment, and could not produce a third holder without a bloodline and an armed faction.

Other strains.

Oil. Iran is a rentier state and the framework handles this badly. Its own related finding is that **a rent is attached to the ground and transfers to whoever takes the wellhead**, while a subsidy is attached to a person the payer chooses. Which cuts two ways here, and both matter. It means the state's revenue was never attached to popular consent, so the mass audience does not have to be bought — the two-audience structure collapses toward one audience, the armed. And it means the revenue is **seizable**, which is precisely why control of the ground, and therefore the Guard, is the operative question. Sanctions complicate this considerably, since a rent requires the ability to sell, and the Guard's control of evasion networks is part of how it became indispensable.

But the population is not irrelevant. The Guard and Basij are recruited from it, and a floor is men who could each refuse. The mass matters here not as taxpayers but as the raw material of the floor — which is a different dependency, not the absence of one.

External war as a confound. An order under attack is cohesive for reasons that have nothing to do with its anchor, and Iran has been under sustained attack for eighteen months. Everything in Parts IX and XII is measured during a period in which the ordinary tests do not run.

And the recency problem. The 2025–26 material is press and analytical reporting on a live conflict, much of it contested, some of it from parties with interests. The framework's *shape* claims are more robust than any particular reported episode, and the reader should discount the episodes accordingly.

Part XIV — The excluded, and the discipline

This project requires every study to name the people who were inside an order's coercive reach and outside its settlement.

Under the monarchy: the imprisoned, the tortured, the exiled, the students shot at Qom in January 1978 and at Tabriz in February and at Yazd in March, and the crowds killed in Tehran that September. The framework's description of the Pahlavi capture campaign as an efficient dismantling of rival institutions is an account of what was done to the human beings who ran them.

In the settlement that followed: the leftist, nationalist and minority movements that had helped bring down the monarchy and were suppressed within three years; the several thousand political prisoners executed in 1988 after summary hearings, the act over which Montazeri objected and lost his position; and the Baha'i community, which holds no place in the constitutional order at all and has been persecuted throughout.

In the war of 1980–88, which this study describes in a clause as having expanded the Guard's size and prestige, several hundred thousand people died, and very young volunteers were used in ways their families were not consulted about.

In the decades since: the demonstrators of 2009, 2019 and 2022, and the women against whom the compulsory dress code is enforced, who are the population the order's coercive capacity is most routinely used upon.

And in 2025–26: a campaign of foreign strikes has killed a head of state, dozens of officials, and — as in every such campaign — people who were not officials, in cities. Nothing in this study's structural interest in what those killings did to an interregnum should be read as anything else.

On the vocabulary. This study has called human beings a *following*, a *floor*, a *stock* and *raw material*, and has described a mourning calendar as a *coordination machine*. That register is chosen because vagueness about mechanism has protected more atrocity than it has prevented. But it makes suffering sound like a variable, and the debt should be paid once in plain words.

The forty-day cycle was not a machine. It was families burying their children and then, forty days later, burying more. And Shariatmadari, whose recognition of Khomeini as a Grand Ayatollah in 1964 is cited here as an elegant demonstration of credential distance, saved the life of the man whose state would later strip him of his rank and hold him under house arrest until he died.

Legibility is not pardon.

Conclusion

The stock, the robe, and the men who cannot weave one.

The Revolutionary Guard commands the violence in Iran, holds the missiles and the intelligence services, runs a large share of the economy, and in March 2026 determined who would occupy the highest office in the state. They are the armed men, and their problem is the one this project exists to study: **force takes and cannot keep, because keeping is a claim about tomorrow and about other people, and a weapon has nothing to say to either.**

They cannot solve it themselves. Anything a commander mints is worth a commander's current strength, and every other commander knows it — so a general who declared himself the source of Iranian legitimacy would, in the same act, have manufactured the reason for the next general to try.

What they have instead is a robe they did not weave. The occultation of the twelfth Imam is ninth-century. The emulation system that made jurists into authorities was assembled by scholars and their followers across the eighteenth and nineteenth. The mourning calendar that timed the revolution and the Karbala narrative that forms the Guard's own men are older than both, and the second is a story about **a rightful authority destroyed by a usurping state** — not a convenient thing to have invented, and nobody invented it. Every load-bearing piece of the Islamic Republic's legality was made by people who were not competing for anything it distributes and could not have imagined its use.

Which is exactly the property a source of title must have, and exactly the property no ruler can give himself. **They captured it, because capture is the only available relationship to a thing of that kind.**

And once you see that, the whole shape of the last forty-seven years reads as one motion. A clerical class with a credential no shah could issue overthrew a state — and had no army, so it built one. It made the interpreter into a claimant, and within three years defrocked a source of emulation, which four centuries of shahs could not do. It lowered the qualification for its own apex in 1989 when the doctrine could not produce a man who met it. And in March 2026, in the eight days between an airstrike and an announcement, the force it had built acquired a new commander-in-chief while there was no Leader to appoint one, and then pressed an Assembly into installing a mid-ranking cleric whose claim rests on being his father's son.

They did not take the throne, and the reason is the most instructive thing in the case. A general who takes it becomes a competitor authoring his own title, in front of men who are all computing whether they could do the same. What they needed was a claim none of them could have become — and descent is the one thing conquest cannot confer. The Guard reached for a bloodline for the same structural reason Timur married a Chinggisid princess and ruled through puppet khans he could have dispensed with in an afternoon.

So the contest has gone where it always goes. Nobody will attack the anchor, because nobody can forge it and nobody gains by breaking it. **The prize is control of the appointment** — and that has been taken three times by three different methods inside one lifetime: by writing the doctrine that defines the office, by amending the qualification that fills it, and by pressuring the body that names the man. None of those touched the ground. All of them touched the route to the chair.

Which is the finding this project keeps arriving at from every direction. Turkish sultans investing themselves from a caliph with no army. Slave soldiers keeping a caliph in Cairo for two and a half centuries. A shogunate ruling in the name of an emperor whose only asset was that his line was older than anyone's ability to claim it. A British officer standing in Sokoto in 1903 taking the appointment of every emir and announcing in the same breath that he would not touch the religion, because that was the half he could not have.

Same thing, different robe. And in every case the robe was woven by somebody else, long before, for something else entirely — which is the only way a robe of that kind has ever been made.

A note on sources and scholarship

Every borrowed idea is explained in the text rather than invoked on authority; this note gives the references and the reservations.

On the framework. Possession and ownership, the anchor, the bystander mechanism, exaptation and the sincerity finding, the interpreter's two functions, credential distance, the floor as a nested settlement and the guard theorem are developed across this project's theoretical papers — principally *What Force Cannot Do*, which consolidates them, with *The Shape of the Sieve*, *The Distance to the Sword*, *No Empty Ground*, *What the Conqueror Cannot Author* and *The Guard That Cannot Be Turned*. The underlying scholarship is James D. Fearon on commitment problems (*International Organization*, 1995), Barry R. Weingast on coordination and shared standards (*American Political Science Review*, 1997), Michael Suk-Young Chwe on ritual and common knowledge (*Rational Ritual*, 2001), and Stephen Jay Gould and Elisabeth Vrba on exaptation (*Paleobiology*, 1982). The horizontal application among armed peers is this project's extension.

On Twelver Shi'ism and the clerical institution. The occultation, the Usuli settlement establishing *ijtihad* and *taqlid*, the emergence of the *marja' al-taqlid*, and the *khums* and *sahm-e Imam* system follow the standard reference literature. The characterisation of the *marja'* as made by peer reputation and lay following rather than by appointment, and the resulting financial independence from any state, is the settled scholarly account and is the load-bearing structural fact of this study.

On the Safavid conversion. Ismail I's declaration of Twelver Shi'ism on taking Tabriz in 1501 and the century-long conversion by imported scholars, endowment, patronage and force follow the standard accounts.

On the Tobacco Protest. The March 1890 concession to Major G. F. Talbot; the 1891 protests; the December 1891 ruling attributed to Mirza Hasan Shirazi from Samarra declaring tobacco use tantamount to war against the Hidden Imam; the universal observance including within the Shah's household; the crowds waiting for Shirazi's word before resuming; and the revocation of 5 January 1892 with damages of £500,000 and further compensation, were checked against the standard reference accounts. Nikki Keddie's *Religion and Rebellion in Iran* remains the standard treatment. The fatwa's authorship is described in several accounts as *attributed* to Shirazi and later confirmed by him; the argument does not depend on that question,

since what it requires is that the ruling was obeyed and its author was beyond the Shah's reach.

On the Pahlavi period. Reza Shah's judicial, educational and endowment reforms and the 1936 unveiling; the reorganisation of the Qom seminary in 1922; the 1953 coup; the White Revolution and the June 1963 uprising; the capitulations bill of 1964 and the exile to Turkey and Najaf, follow the standard literature, principally Ervand Abrahamian's *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (1982). The episode in which senior clerics moved to have Khomeini recognised as a Grand Ayatollah to protect him from execution follows the standard accounts.

On velayat-e faqih and its reception. Khomeini's Najaf lectures of 1970, published as *Islamic Government*; the doctrinal basis in the jurist's guardianship over those unable to manage their own affairs; and its rejection by nearly all senior contemporaries — including Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei at Najaf and Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari at Qom, with Montazeri the principal pre-revolutionary exception — follow the standard literature and were checked for this study.

On 1978–79. The *Ettela'at* article of 7 January 1978 and the Qom protest of 9 January; the forty-day cycle through Tabriz on 18 February, Yazd at the end of March and further rounds in May; the mosque and bazaar network; and the Imperial Army's declaration of neutrality on 11 February 1979 followed by heavy purges, follow the standard accounts, principally Charles Kurzman's *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (2004), from which the cycle and the participants' own phrase for it are taken. Casualty figures for individual episodes vary widely and are not relied on.

On the constitution and the institutions. The 1979 referendum and constitution establishing the Leader, the Guardian Council and its vetting power; the establishment of the IRGC by decree in the spring of 1979 and formally in May, and the Basij in November; Article 143 on the regular army and Article 150 on the Guard's duty of guarding the Revolution and its achievements; and the Special Court for the Clergy, follow the constitutional text and the standard literature.

On Shariatmadari's demotion. His opposition to velayat-e faqih and boycott of the referendum; the suppression of the associated party after the Tabriz rising; the 1982 allegation; the stripping of clerical rank and death under house arrest in 1986, follow the standard accounts. The characterisation of the demotion as unprecedented — a state removing a rank the state had never conferred — is this study's, and is the framework's central point about the case.

On 1989. Montazeri's removal in spring 1989; Khomeini's appointment of a revision council on 24 April; his death on 3 June; the Assembly's selection of Khamenei on 4 June after a senior *marja'* was proposed and passed over; and the

referendum of 28 July amending Article 109 to remove the *marja'* requirement — the only amendment to date — were checked against the standard reference accounts. Saïd Amir Arjomand's *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors* (2009) is the standard treatment.

On the Guard's expansion. The war's effect on its size and standing; the post-war economic base through its engineering arm; its separate branches, missile programme and foreign-operations arm; and its budgetary and recruitment advantages over the regular army, follow the standard analytical literature including work by Ali Alfoneh and the Middle East Institute.

On 2025–26, which is the least settled material here. The strikes of 13 June 2025 killing the IRGC commander-in-chief, the aerospace commander and the chief of the general staff, and the same-day decree appointing Mohammad Pakpour published over the Leader's signature; the killing of Ali Khamenei on 28 February 2026; the appointment of Ahmad Vahidi as IRGC commander-in-chief on 1 March; the Interim Leadership Council of the president, the judiciary head and a senior cleric; the initial two-thirds vote for Mojtaba Khamenei on 3 March, described in reporting as the point at which the Guard's generals gained the upper hand; the destruction of the Leader's compound on 6 March; the transition council's de-escalation announcement of 7 March and the generals' reported anger at it; and the announcement of 8 March with immediate pledges of backing from the Guard and the armed forces, are drawn from contemporaneous news and analytical reporting, including Al Jazeera, the *Jerusalem Post*, the *Irish Times*, Reuters and the Critical Threats Project. All of it concerns an ongoing conflict, much is contested, and some comes from parties with interests. The framework's structural claims are more robust than any individual reported episode, and Part XIII says so.

On what is not attempted. This study makes no claim to original historical research in Iranian or Islamic history, which it enters as a visitor. Its contribution is analytical: to read one order against a structural framework; to record what the case gives the framework and where the framework's predictions have failed; and to state plainly that its most recent material describes a live situation whose outcome is not known.